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ABSTRACT

A methodology for evaluating the service area of a community college and determining potential student markets is discussed. It is suggested that because of locality-based operations, projected higher education enrollment declines may be felt severely by community colleges. Because of the special nature of examining a specific geographical area, identification of potential students is approached from both the individual and organizational aspects. The methodology emphasizes the development of profiles of identified subgroups of potential students, either on an individual or organizational basis. The four areas comprising the proposed methodology include: (1) establishment of identifiable subgroups of potential students; (2) collection of data representative of each of the subgroups identified: (3) evaluation of the respective subgroups as to potential recruitment, educational needs and attitudes, and relationship with major college programs: and (4) development of recruitment profiles of those subgroups that appear to offer the best possibility for student recruitment. It is suggested that with the information provided from this research, institutional researchers can play an integral role in the student recruitment process and interact with other administrative personnel in a total institutional recruitment process. (Author/SF)

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RECRUITMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH IN THE 1980's

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Recruitment and Institutional Research in the 1980's

Introduction

For the 1980's, enrollment predictions forecast declining or stabilizing enrollment for most institutions of higher education. After a long period of tremendous growth, most institutions will find themselves in an era of zero or negative growth. The implications are far-reaching and will have an effect on all areas within the institution. The stabilization of student growth will effect those institutions whose financial funding is based on an enrollment formula scheme. The unprecedented growth in operating budgets, increases in the number of new faculty positions, and the construction of new academic facilities will be drastically curtailed. Many institutions will now face the feasibility of implementing retrenchment policies.

Because of their locality oriented programming, community colleges could be faced with the potential of a limited student market. On the other hand, community colleges are more adaptable to accepting greater numbers of non-traditional students. Particularly in the occupational-technical areas, community colleges can provide vocational training which can attract large numbers of part-time students. The key to community college enrollments lies with its ability to adapt programs to the changing needs of its service area clientele. Within a definite service region, community colleges will need to implement procedures for identifying potential students. Incorporating obtainable demographic information, community colleges will need to develop multi-faceted recruitment strategies for attracting students from their diverse regional population. From within this diverse potential student market, institutions will have to develop and implement evaluation strategies to assist in identifying and recruiting new students. Groups of potential students could be identified from aggregated data representative of many facets of the service area in which the community college is located.

The purpose of this paper is to describe a methodology which institutional researchers can implement to evaluate the service area of their community college and assess potential subgroups of students. Because of the special nature of the service area to a community college, identification of potential students was approached from both the individual and organizational aspects. The methodology outlines the development of profiles of identified subgroups of potential students, either on an individual or organizational basis. Briefly, the following four major areas comprise the proposed methodology:

1) establishment of identifiable subgroups of potential students;
2) collection of data representative of each of the subgroups identified;
3) evaluation of the respective subgroups as to educational needs in respect to existing/proposed academic programs, attitude toward the institution and potential enrollment; and

4) for those subgroups with the best possibility of student enrollment development of recruitment profiles.

The following information describes how the methodology can be implemented to develop potential recruitment profiles on both the individual and organizational level.

Methodology

General Service Area Profile

The first step in the development of any recruitment profiles would be to perform a demographic analysis of the colleges' service area. Basic information on the composition of the area residents by such variables as sex, race, age, average income and level of education attainment would be extremely beneficial. In addition, population projections incorporating these variables would also be crucial in assessing any long-range enrollment goals. Because of the concentrated occupational/technical nature of community colleges, both current and projected employment data would be needed in assessing current and proposed academic programs. Combining population and employment information, a general profile of the service area can be determined. This general information can be very helpful in evaluating both short- and long-range goals for student enrollment and academic programs. With general information, the institutional researcher can pursue the development of more specific profiles for subgroups on both the indiviudal and organizational level.

General College Profile

To support a regional profile, a general profile of the institution itself can be of benefit in the assessment of potential students. Particularly, an analysis of the composition of current students can provide information on what segment of the service area clientele is presently taking advantage of the institution's services. Usually only 1-2 percent of the total service area population are involved in the institution's educational programs. Combined with historical student data, enrollment trends can be evaluated and projections can be determined. Compared to regional data, these projections can be evaluated and in turn, modified if necessary.

Selected Student Profiles

Representing a large number of individuals at many institutions, information on former students, the so-called drop-outs, can be very enlightening. Insight into why these students failed to return can assist in the development or modification of recruitment plans, particularly for certain subgroups of potential students. In addition, retention studies on an institution's academic programs will provide

information concerning shifting enrollment trends and may reveal certain academic strengths and weaknesses within programs. Information on former students will provide valuable input for the development of individual oriented recruitment profiles, especially by highlighting particular needs that might have limited their continued participation.

Another group of students who can assist in recruitment planning are graduates. Though these students represent only a small fraction of the total number of individuals who have attended a community college, graduate surveys can provide valuable information on instructional evaluation, preparation for continuing study and/or employment, and attitudes toward the institution, that is its facilities, faculty and academic programs. Incorporation of firsthand information from graduates can provide excellent data for both internal evaluation and external dissemination, particularly when directed toward specific subgroups of potential students. Longitudinal comparisons of graduate data can assist in the evaluation of academic programs, particularly as it relates to post-community college activities. The use of this information from graduates can help in attracting new students who have similar socio-economic characteristics.

Academic Program Profiles

To compliment student enrollment analyses, evaluation of present and proposed academic programs is essential. Examination of academic programs in regard to student needs and external demands can provide information necessary for maintaining program acceptability. Simple academic program profiles can be prepared to highlight enrollment growth, curriculum changes and future developments. Commitment of resources to programs can be compared to student interest and vocational training needs. Combined with recognized needs of the service area, certain academic programs could be emphasized so as to attract additional students. Resources to those academic programs whose enrollments are declining, certain resources could be allocated to those programs that are expanding. Evaluation of current and proposed academic programs to projected student demands would be necessary so as to assist in the best match between institutional planning and community needs.

Individual Profiles

For the individual level, profiles of potential students can be based on similarities related to residential location or activity. Residential profiles can be developed with the acquisition of basic socio-economic data aggregated by some recognizable unit, such as cities, boroughs, zip code areas or census tracts. The larger and more diverse the composition of the service area population, then greater is the need for residential or subregional information. Analysis of the socio-economic data for each recognizable 'unit' can provide

information for the formation of residential profiles. Evaluation of the data could provide insight into the average family income, average educational level attained, major occupational pursuits, age distribution, and dependence on public transportation. Analysis of these data can provide assistance for each 'unit' in determining the potential educational needs, the possible age grouping that might be most attracted, the need for financial assistance and/or public transportation, whether day or evening programs would be more attractive, and which academic programs might be most successful in recruiting new or former students. The development of descriptive profiles for selected areas could highlight different potential student subgroups as well as identify special needs that might assist in recruitment.

To support socio-economic data, attitude surveys could be conducted in those selected subregional areas targeted for special recruitment practices. Attitude surveys can be very helpful in providing insight on the perceptions of the service area clientele toward the institution and its academic programs. Also, samples of potential students are contacted through such surveys who will indicate what conditions will be necessary for them to enroll at the institution. Though more difficult to perform, the data obtained from the attitude surveys, combined with general demographic data, can provide sufficient information for the formation of subregional profiles. These subregional profiles can be integrated into the institutional recruitment plan as a means for attracting students on an individual basis.

To assist the institutional researcher in data collection, the following agencies are cited as potential sources for raw and interpretative data:

1) state and local employment commission
2) state and local planning districts
3) state and county planning and budgeting departments
4) city/county governments
5) major business/industry corporations
6) public utilities
7) state and city revenue departments
8) federal and state census data

Organizational Profiles

Indirectly, organizations within the service area can serve as influencial sources of students. Based on their services, organizations may be limited to a specific group of the institution's clientele, but does not have to. Because of their similarities, organizations within the service area can be aggregated into groups. These organizational groups can be examined to determine potential education needs with respect to the size and composition of the individuals involved in each organizational group and the academic programs offered by the institution. The following is a sample of some of the major groupings

of organizations that are usually located in community college service area: armed forces, business/industry, religious organizations, civic/service clubs, federal, state and local governments, garden clubs, labor/trade unions, non-profit organizations, recreational clubs, and youth organizations.

Based on academic programming, evaluation of certain organizational groupings could be important in an institution's effort to attract specific students. Similar to subregional profiles, profiles of certain organizational groupings could be compiled. Information could be obtained that might assist existing programs or help support the development of new ones. Most of the major organizations can provide basic demographic data pertaining to the composition of its membership, such as sex, race, average income and educational level. Descriptive profiles of these organizational group could be developed to describe their respective membership. This information can have a twofold effort; one, future educational needs of the organizational group can be determined and academic programs can be modified to accomodate those needs; and two, descriptive information for certain employment related organizational groups can assist in attracting students who would like to pursue a vocation in that area. For employment oriented organizational groups, various agencies usually maintain current descriptive data that would be helpful in developing selective profiles. Several major sources of organizational information are:

1) state employment commission
2) state and local planning districts
3) Chamber of Commerce
4) city/county governments
5) U.S. and state census data
6) city/county planning/economic offices.

A multitude of community agencies exist that could provide descriptive data on most organizational groupings. Employment-oriented groupings are probably the easiest to obtain information on, depending on the level of detail desired.

As with the subregional profiles, the incorporation of attitudinal surveys with the membership of selective organization groups can provide useful information. For employment oriented groups, institutions can determine what programs need to be implemented or what changes to existing programs should be incorporated. For the specialty oriented groups, such as civic, service or social, attitudinal surveys can inform prospective students of unique courses or non-degree programs oriented toward their particular interest. Surveys can collect information as well as disseminate information.

In the development of organizational groupings, community colleges will have to assess their census area and determine which groups have the highest priority. Traditionally, the occupational/technical groups have received the greatest attention, particularly in response to

expanding academic programs. With limited enrollments, community colleges can lead the way in developing the life-long learning concept by expanding the continual involvement of older adults in higher education. The search for additional or replacement students may require reevaluation of the priority given to evaluating the needs of the non-employment oriented groups. The expansion of non-vocational programs can be successful if they are structured to meet the demands of existing groups of potential students.

Conclusion

In light of limited enrollments and corresponding fiscal constraints, institutions of higher education will need to develop and implement flexible recruitment programs. Competitive recruiting practices between institutions are expanding and will continue into the 1990's. Community colleges, with their identifiable service region, are faced with an equal problem. As the traditional student market declines, community colleges will have to expand their efforts to attract additional students from the non-traditional categories. Evaluation and determination of the unique needs of these non-traditional students may be the solution to community college enrollments.

Target groups of potential students need to be identified with the service area so that unique recruitment programs can be developed. With foreknowledge of the needs and desires of specific subgroups, recruitment strategies can be modified so as to highlight certain academic programs, activities, personal assistance programs, and the potential advantages of pursuing additional education. For employment areas, specific training programs can be expanded or started in response to industry/business demands. For non-employment areas, a multitude of specialty programs and courses could be established to satisfy non-vocational demands. The development of recruitment profiles can serve two purposes: one, to determine the needs of specific groups; and two, to stimulate and to inform service area clientele of the academic programs and services available at the community college.

The methodology discussed emphasizes the role of institutional research in the total recruitment process; that is, the development of descriptive profiles based on individual and organizational data. Some overlapping in recruitment strategies for individuals and organizations may occur, however, because of the confined nature of the service area. These descriptive profiles should be integrated into the total institutional plan for student recruitment and should be periodically updated. Certain demographic data could be obtained yearly while selected individual and organizational groupings could be examined on a multi-year basis.

With financial constraints increasing constantly, institutions will need to concentrate their recruitment activities in those areas

which appear to be most beneficial. Institutional research can play an integral role in the student recruitment process by providing descriptive profiles of groupings of potential students. With such information, institutional researchers can interact with other administrative personnel in the evaluation and implementation of a total institutional recruitment program.

COLLEGE PROCESS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES